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ABSTRACT

Outcomes Based Education (OBE) is viewed as a drastic break from current educational practices and a means of providing educational success for all students. OBE is also advocated as a practice that lead to educational inequity. This paper reexamines OBE from a multiparadigm perspective of organizations and educational administration. OBE is based on objectives tied to learner outcomes, core and extended curriculum, mastery learning, accountability via information management systems, and criterion-referenced assessments. The multiparadigm approach is comprised of the structural-functional, interpretivist, critical, and poststructural theories. The examination reveals that although facets of outcome based practice are empowering to students and teachers, much of the system continues to be lodged in a framework that aims toward structure and control. A conclusion is that an uneasy partnership can exist between critical and poststructural theory, in which critical theory provides the emancipatory direction and poststructuralism offers the tools to avoid creating a new power elite. (22 references) (LMI)

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Outcomes based education re-examined:
From structural functionalism to poststructuralism

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Abstract

Outcomes Based Education (OBE) views itself as a drastic break from current educational practices and a means of providing educational success for all students. Though not stated in overt terms, OBE also positions itself as a means of "emancipating" students and teachers from traditional practices which lead to educational inequity. This paper re-examines OBE from a multiparadigm perspective of organizations and educational administration. This examination reveals that although there does indeed seem to be facets of Outcome Based practice which are empowering to students and teachers, much of the system continues to be lodged in a framework which aims toward structure and control.

Outcomes based education re-examined: From structural functionalism to poststructuralism

> . . . our educational system needs a new theoretical and operating paradigm. . . the new paradigm must be success-based in philosophy and outcome-based in practice (Spady & Marshall, 1992, p. 67).

American education's quest for a system which meets the needs of all students has been hastened over the last decade by the increasingly negative light in which public schools have been viewed. A variety of groups, from parents to business people have decried the lack of basic academic and interpersonal skill that typifies today's high school graduate. The failure to provide an equitable education to underrepresented or disenfranchised students has been even more dismal. In larger urban centers, where ethnic and economically deprived groups are in majority, drop-out rates hover around the 50% level, while many of those who do not drop out are learning at an unacceptable level. Even in rural settings where students of color may not be as prevalent, other groups of students are not well served (Capper, 1989). So-called at-risk students, students with disabilities, and students of low socioeconomic status are shunted into euphemistically titled systems which only serve to remove them from educational opportunity. American schools,

then, are faced with demands from a diverse group of constituencies wanting to improve educational quality for students for the benefit of society and the work force.

One method of educational improvement which has gained acceptance over the past three decades is Outcomes Based Education (OBE). Advocates of OBE tout it as a means of meeting the needs of all students regardless of their environment, ethnicity, economic status, or disabling condition. OBE claims to create greater curricular focus, develop better instructional methods, and assess student achievement with precise clarity and validity. Many schools and entire state educational systems (Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Washington, and Pennsylvania) have welcomed OBE with open arms and launched into long term commitments to become OBE systems.

In this analysis, we review the origin and basic tenets of OBE. A multiparadigm theoretical approach provides the backdrop against which to examine OBE, specifically in terms of its implied ability to "emancipate" students who have typically been ill-served by the current educational system.

Origins and Principles

In the view of OBE theorists and practitioners, current instructional practices in education are built around issues of time (calendar) and student custody (promotion/retention) rather than guaranteeing student success. OBE sees school systems as

being ruled by the calendar (Spady, 1982, 1988). In a conventional system the year is divided into units of time during which specific information is taught in a prescribed fashion. After units are taught and the prescribed time for instruction of material has expired, summative assessment is conducted and grades are permanently assigned and entered in the grade book, report card, and cumulative record. Because schools structure their delivery system around issues of instructional time rather than student learning mastery, the sorting and selecting of students is an inevitable artifact of the instructional process. In a system which holds time and opportunity to learn constant, the level of learning mastery will appear to align itself along a traditional bell shaped curve (Spady, 1988).

Spady (1982, 1988) also views curriculum selection as an amorphously conceived process in which committees select packaged textbook series covering a variety of material. Upon selection, this series effectively becomes a curriculum in and of itself. This hypothetical series may or may not meet critical student learning needs in each subject or grade. The end result is an ill defined curriculum only loosely tied to the skills which are critical for students to master.

This shapeless heap of knowledge is then subjected to the same time constraints mentioned previous. Students and staff are subjected to the pressure of staggering through this curricular morass in a quick and standardized fashion. Few teachers would

deny feeling the pressure of having to "get to the end of the book" by year's end.

Thus, whatever learning takes place is dictated by an ill-defined curriculum, and the pace at which the material is covered is driven by the calendar, rather than student need. The system becomes "input driven" rather than "outcomes based" or results oriented.

King and Evans (1992) trace the roots of OBE to ideas in American education developed over the past three decades, including the work of Tyler and Bloom. The common elements of this work and the direction which OBE advocates hope to shift current educational practices include: a change in philosophy and beliefs, objectives tied to learner outcomes, core and extended curriculum development, mastery learning, accountability via an information management system, and criterion referenced assessment (Spady, 1982).

First, OBE emphasizes the importance of a philosophy based on the assumptions that all students can learn and succeed, success breeds success, and schools control the conditions of success. Second, in the design of what is to be taught, all decisions are driven by the vision of "what the student should be able to do" upon completion of various milestones: a lesson, a unit, a subject or grade, or a public school career. Before a curriculum is developed, the expected learner outcomes must be known so that curriculum objectives can be aimed at accomplishing

them. Thus, rather than "objectives derived . . . from content or textbook outlines. . . [objectives are developed] based on desired changes in the learner" (King & Evans, 1992, p. 73).

Third, upon completion of the learner outcomes, both core and extended curricula are developed. The core curricula is the focused curriculum which every student is expected to learn, based on the learner outcomes. The extended curriculum exists for students who master the core curriculum more quickly. They are then given "extensions" or "enrichments" of the core curriculum, while their slower learning peers are given additional opportunities to master the core curriculum.

Fourth, OBE relies heavily on the technique of mastery learning (Bloom, 1968, 1976). Further, it takes the philosophical stance that all students can master a core curriculum if they are given the time to do so; the assumption being that ability (intelligence) does not set a cap on the amount that a student can learn, but rather on the time needed to master that material (Carroll, 1963).

Bloom's mastery learning principles call for students to master prerequisite skills before moving on to advanced skills. Thus, no student will be asked to learn a skill for which s/he does not have prerequisite knowledge. In the spirit of the OBE philosophy, that student is then given additional opportunity to learn the prerequisite, as it is assumed that the student simply needs more time to learn.

Fifth, the management of information pertaining to learning mastery is a critical response to the call for accountability in education. OBE advocates strongly suggest that schools develop a computer managed system which can give a teacher the means to store and manipulate data about student achievement and prerequisite knowledge. This data can determine which students have the prerequisite skills for and those who have already mastered particular objectives. Students can then be grouped based on their learning needs.

If a school defines its curriculum to the point OBE advocates demand, it is necessary to have an equally focused assessment system. An assessment which tests only 50% of the extant curriculum, as do many commercially produced tests, is unacceptable. Assessments which validly assess 100% of the material taught, and only that material, are a basic requirement. In addition, students are allowed to demonstrate mastery of an outcome at any time in their schooling for full credit. They are not required to demonstrate mastery shortly after the time a given skill is taught. In essence, no grades of "F" are given. A student simply has an "I", or Incomplete, until s/he demonstrates mastery.

These are the components through which Outcomes Based Education seeks to make learning an equitable experience for all learners; by adopting a philosophy which assumes all students can learn, and incorporating teaching techniques and educational

structures which enhance rather than impede the opportunity for students to do so.

More globally, Spady (1992) distinguishes between traditional, transitional, and transformational outcomes based education. Spady explains that ". . . OBE is evolving from a microcurriculum and instructional design approach to a more comprehensive approach" (Spady & Marshall, 1992, p. 67).

Spady and Marshall (1992) believe that all of the current OBE approaches in local districts are using traditional OBE. In traditional OBE, the current curriculum is reviewed, and priorities are set for learning. Spady finds five problems with this approach. Demonstration of competence is limited to small segments of instruction; the content and structure of the curriculum remains the same except with clearer focus; the performance context is assumed to be the classroom or school; the curriculum is only loosely aligned with exit outcomes at graduation and these outcomes tend to be narrow in scope; and it doesn't challenge the time frame of schooling and "credentialing or placement" (p. 69). In sum, traditional OBE tries to render the current educational content and process into a more efficient, streamlined system.

Transitional OBE focuses on "higher order" exit outcomes, in response to the question "What is most essential for our students to know, be able to do, and be like in order to be successful once they've graduated?" (Spady & Marshall, 1992, p. 69). The

result are outcomes which "emphasize broad attitudinal, affective, motivational, and relational qualities or orientations" as well as "critical thinking, effective communication, technological applications, and complex problem solving" (p. 69).

Transformational OBE ". . . is a collaborative, flexible, transdisciplinary, outcome-based, open-system, empowerment-oriented approach to schooling" (Spady & Marshall, 1992, p. 68). According to Spady, transformational OBE is centered on "why do schools exist in this day and age?" (Spady & Marshall, 1992, p. 70). The OBE response is "to equip all students with the knowledge, competence, and orientations needed for success after they leave school. Hence, its guiding vision of the graduate is that of competence future citizen" (p. 78). To its credit, "transformational OBE takes nothing about schooling today as a given; no existing features are considered untouchable in carrying out a curriculum design" (p. 70). Districts are asked to ". . . thoroughly examine, critique, and synthesize the best available information about the conditions of life students are likely to encounter in their future" (p. 71).

In sum, outcomes-based education, following a long line of related curriculum work, can be characterized as traditional, transitional, or transformational, and pivots on objectives tied to learner outcomes, core and extended curriculum, mastery

learning, accountability via information management systems, and criterion referenced assessments.

Specific Focus

This analysis does not attempt to judge OBE on its technical merits or flaws, but rather examines its underlying assumptions via its epistemological and theoretical underpinnings. Though OBE advocates have never been quite so bold as to declare their system as "emancipatory", or a means of freeing disenfranchised groups (ethnic, disability, etc.) from the oppression of current convention, the advocates are uncompromising in their stance that "all" students can benefit from this approach. OBE has also, without doubt, presented itself as a radical departure from the current educational paradigm, indeed as "paradigm pioneers" (Spady & Marshall, 1992, p. 68). In so doing, OBE advocates seem to be telling all educational stakeholders that an outcomes orientation will free them from the shackles of that oppressive and ineffective system.

Since OBE does lay implicit claim to empowering typically underrepresented groups, we use Capper's (in press) multiparadigm theoretical framework for schools in a pluralistic society as a basis for critically examining OBE. In this manner, the validity of considering OBE practice as a force in social change (educational equity) can be examined. After these analyses, suggestions and implications for how OBE could become a truly

emancipatory educational model (if indeed it is not) will be discussed.

A Multiparadigm Approach

The conceptual and theoretical framework for this examination of OBE is grounded in the work of Capper (in press) and her multiparadigm approach for school administration in a pluralistic society. Derived from the work of Burrell and Morgan (1979), Sirotnik and Oakes (1986), and poststructural philosophers and their feminist interpretations, this approach is oriented, in part, along the axes of an objective/subjective interpretation of epistemology and ontology, and a social regulation/emancipation methodology. In Capper's model, these axes form three paradigms: the structural-functional, interpretivist, and critical theory paradigms. She further invokes poststructuralism as a fourth paradigm in her approach. Capper contends that these paradigms have strengths as well as weaknesses, but that all can contribute to administrative theory and practice when considering equity.

Structural functionalism and interpretivism. The initial paradigms, structural functional and interpretive, are oriented toward regulating and maintaining current social order. They differ only in their view of the objective or subjective nature of that social reality. Within these, all behavior is interpreted within the framework of a single (structural

functional) or multiple (interpretive) social reality. All such behavior is framed within a social order and structure that is viewed as pre-determined and inexorable. No interpretations other than the status quo are considered or validated.

We use Poplin and Stone's (1992) principles of holistic constructivist learning theory contrasted with their reductionist pedagogical counterparts to view OBE from a structural functional and interpretivist perspective (see Table 1). The

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Insert Table 1 about here

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behavior/reductionist learning process emanates from the structural functionalist paradigm. Holistic constructivist learning theory originates out of the underpinnings of the interpretivist paradigm. Specifically we compare and contrast the principles of OBE, including transformational OBE with the twelve principles of behavioral/reductionist learning process and holistic constructivist learning theory, and determine to what extent OBE is aligned with each.

Critical theory paradigm. The critical theory paradigm is powerfully oriented toward creating social change. Critical theorists believe that individuals and groups are oppressed by actual or perceived structures in society. People are prevented access to knowledge and opportunity by real, tangible, social impediments or their beliefs, perceptions, and interpretation

that such a situation exists. According to Capper (in press) critical theory embraces a concern for suffering and oppression, a critical view of education, leadership oriented toward empowerment and transformation, an emphasis on morals and values and rationality, and a reliance on the intellect. Critical theory's hallmark is its unyielding drive to emancipate oppressed and disenfranchised populations. Towards that end, critical theory relies on rational, logical, and reasonable thinking and discourse to help oppressed groups recognize, understand, and act against the objects of their oppression.

Critical theory, however, fails to be a panacea for educational change (Capper, in press). First, critical theory is rooted in modernism, and as such proposes to solve any problem--such as the oppression of certain classes of people--through the use of pure reason. These methods of critical analysis purport to discover the existence of an answer, or universal solution, which already exists. Second, such reasoning ignores subjective experience and intuition. Third, critical theory relies on discourse as the object of analysis, and language as the medium of reason, believing all problems to be soluble through such methods. This reliance on language ". . . effectively eliminates persons of diverse cultures, children who may not have yet acquire speech competence, or persons with limited speech competence, from participating. . ." (Capper, in press, p. 16).

Fourth, critical theorists believe that "a network of interacting individuals who, through the common sense of ordinary discourse, can reach a 'universal consensus' of human experience" (Cooper and Burrell, 1988). This has been referred to as the search for "grand narratives" (Lyotard, 1984) which explain complex phenomenon with rationality and consensus. Critical theory fails to mine the positive contributions of dissensus and conflict. Fifth, critical theory pays more attention to issues of social class and, in general, ignores the complexities of oppression in other areas.

In this analysis, we position the principles of OBE aside the basic constructs of critical theory and determine to what extent OBE can be considered critically transformational.

Poststructural theory. Capper (in press) suggests that poststructuralism, as a fourth paradigm, can address some limitations of critical theory by considering the ". . . interactions and contradictions among [personal identity], power, language, and unquestioned underlying assumptions. . . to examine how power is exercised and the potential for change" (p. 19).

Poststructuralists view critical theory's claims of social change through logical methods with great suspicion. Poststructuralists agree with critical theorists that groups in power have, over the centuries, developed social structures, language, texts, and symbols which affect both the subconscious

and pre-conscious thinking and actions of both the dominating and the dominated. This "deep structure," however, is so powerful, and yet so subtle, as to be unbeatable by reason alone--since that which is accepted as rational and common sense is also infected by the deep structures of dominance developed over the centuries. The critical theorist's "act of reason" will simply result in a new form of dominance by those in power.

Poststructuralism views critical theory's desire to reach a rational and logical point of consensual "solution" as misguided. Poststructuralists believe that in consensus lies the coronation of a new power structure. When two people, groups, or societies agree, the resulting consensus leads to agreement of a dominant and subordinate. At that point a power elite emerges, which leads to the deep structures of control perpetuating that power.

Poststructuralists believe the world to be entirely subjective, with reality open to each person's interpretation and interaction with the world. The world is not truly knowable, but humankind possesses an overwhelming desire to impose structure on the world, and "understand" it; rushing to this understanding before it can be experienced. Understanding is seen by poststructuralists as another example of consensus. When one claims to "know" the unknowable, one has rushed to a personal consensus--thereby creating a dominant and subordinate, which in turn creates a structure and does away with the natural tension and process which poststructuralists seek. Poststructuralists

seek to create this tension by "deconstructing" reality (Cooper, 1989). This process examines a concept and seeks to deconstruct its reason, logic, and common sensibility; thereby exposing the deep and oppressive power structures which have erected these so-called rationalities.

From the poststructuralist paradigm we examine the language of OBE. While OBE advocates would probably disagree with our interpretation of this language, the differences in interpretation represent ". . . competing ways of giving meaning to the world, which imply differences in the organization of social power" (Weedon, 1987, p. 24). Examining language within the framework of feminist poststructuralism can uncover which particular values and interests are served, and which ones are silenced. The language also reveals what OBE advocates take-for-granted in education, and what they view as "natural," "normal," and "common sense." The uses of particular terms in OBE can maintain the status quo in regard to existing power relations. A focus on language also reveals which discourses are revered and which are silenced.

Within the language, philosophy, and recommendations for OBE practice, we also explore personal subjectivity or identity. That is, we examine to what extent subjective and affective experiences are considered important. We also question what aspects of identity or student characteristics OBE targets and if students or people with particular characteristics are excluded.

Finally, we focus on other aspects of OBE which could be viewed as ways which perpetuate power inequities, and which hide contradictions in rhetoric and practice.

In sum, we will examine outcomes based education through the lens of Capper's multiparadigm framework: structural functionalism, interpretivism, critical theory and poststructuralism, and determine to what extent OBE and its proponents can be considered "paradigm pioneers." That is, we will explore whether OBE goes beyond the current structural functionalist paradigm which undergirds public education today, as OBE advocates imply; or if it is perhaps simply a repackaging of ideas that perpetuate the structural functionalist paradigm of the educational power elite and again leaves populations with little social power inequitable educational opportunities.

Structural-functionalism and OBE

Many facets of OBE correspond, one-to-one, with many of the principles of behavior/reductionistic learning processes (see again Table 1). In OBE, learning is additive and the sum of the parts is equal to the whole; new learning is simply taken in and recorded as it exists in the curriculum or text, things are learned, not constructed. Learning is regulated by the teacher. There is an ideal sequence in which to present new information and learning is best accomplished from part to whole. Errors are to be avoided, teaching is a science, and technique determines

the degree of student learning. All teachers can teach all students given the appropriate method. The curriculum determines the content and the timing of presentation. Moreover, mastery learning assumes a) learning is additive; the sum of the parts is equal to the whole, b) learning is regulated by the teacher, and c) there is an ideal sequence in which to present new information.

This comparison reveals that many aspects of OBE appear to be firmly lodged in the structural functional paradigm. OBE demands exceptionally tight control over the educational process. Curriculum is rigidly prescribed, as are acceptable teaching practices. Learner grouping is closely monitored as defined by prerequisite skill knowledge. Assessment practices are as closely controlled as the curriculum, as they must precisely match the curriculum taught. All these requirements and controls are undeniably functional.

Interpretivism and OBE

The most damning criticisms of pedagogy grounded in structural functionalism emanate from literature in special education, particularly the critiques of Direct Instruction and curriculum based assessment in the teaching of students with learning disabilities (Heshusius, 1991; Poplin & Stone, 1992). These critiques advocate for teaching practices grounded in the interpretivist paradigm (see again Table 1). Even though Spady

claims that transformational OBE is characterized by cooperative learning, and formed on collaborative structures, when the origins and principles of OBE are compared to the principles of the holistic constructivist teaching/learning process, no match is found.

Critical theory and OBE

From a critical theory perspective, the first question to be considered regards change orientation and goals. Does OBE have an orientation toward creating greater social equality, and greater educational equity for students who have typically been discriminated against? Or does OBE simply present a repackaging of the same limiting educational opportunities that have been allowed students in the minority for many years? Viewed in the context of social change, there seems to be little offered which would qualify for the lofty goal of social transformation. Little of OBE seems oriented toward true emancipation of underrepresented groups, aside from tighter control of the methods utilized to instruct those students.

When challenged from a critical theory perspective, OBE advocates might cry "Foul!" "We are simply controlling the educational process so that all children have a legitimate chance to succeed!," they would likely claim. They would point to the removal of time barriers to learning--that by allowing adequate time for each student to learn, the system will not create failures because time to learn is held constant, and assessment

is not conducted before students have been allowed the time needed to learn a certain skill. Surely these allowances of time and assessment would qualify as restructuring aimed toward social good and equity? Perhaps so.

One way of assessing OBE's critical claims is to compare it to the dimensions of critical theory mentioned earlier. In many ways, OBE seems to have at least a superficial critical orientation based on these criteria. OBE advocates would claim to have a concern for oppression and suffering, as well as ethics and social equality as evidenced by their desire to create an educational world where all students can learn and succeed. In an indirect way they might also claim to empower groups by affording equal educational opportunities to students. OBE also depends most heavily on rational thought and discourse to arrive at these conclusions, as their faith in foundational research and technique demonstrates. In the spirit of pure reason, educators adopting an OBE perspective have assumed tighter controls over the educational process in order to create a "success for all" environment. This might be the claim of OBE advocates when defending their practices against being purely structural-functional.

The one significant area in which OBE cannot lay critical claim is questioning authority and power. To critically analyze the facade of OBE and its relation to power, questions must be asked which help expose the underlying power structure that

dominates its thinking. The poststructural paradigm helps formulate these questions.

Poststructuralism and OBE

From a poststructuralist perspective we examine language, power, identity, common sense, and their parallels and intersections of OBE. In our focus on language, we specifically examine the implicit and explicit power issues associated with the terms "all students," "succeed," "master,", "outcomes," and "control."

"All students". The literature, philosophy, and commandments of OBE unequivocally claim that "all" students can learn and that "all" students can succeed. The literature generally alludes to low SES students, at-risk, slow learners, and ethnic and racial minorities. Yet students with disabilities, those usually shunted to special education programs, are not explicitly named. Further, King and Evans (1992), balk at the "all," and state "Educators become accountable for producing exit outcomes in virtually every student who enters school" (p. 74, emphasis in the original). Aside from the epistemological issues in the practice and philosophy of producing outcomes in students, for which students are public school educators not accountable? King and Evans further acknowledge that ". . . the effect on children with

special needs" (p. 74) constitutes an implementation challenge for OBE in Minnesota.

Thus, even though OBE claims to embrace all students, the principles and practices of OBE may exclude students with disabilities, especially students with cognitive disabilities. For example, OBE purports to remove time barriers, yet curriculum objectives are set for specific grade levels. Aside from the arbitrariness of such specifications, this process does not consider some students with cognitive disabilities who, regardless of time, will never reach their grade level objectives. In addition, if these objectives are measured in standardized ways, it may not be flexible enough for students with learning deficits who may "know" the material, but be unable to perform accurately on evaluation measures.

"Succeed". OBE claims that all students can "succeed." OBE implies that success means mastering what people other than the student deem important, and performing the mastered material in schools and society as they are currently structured. This definition of success appears similar to one type of multicultural education called "teaching the culturally different" (Sleeter & Grant, 1987). Capper (in press) explains:

> Teaching the culturally different means that the focus of school culture and the instructional organization is to provide students with skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the "mainstream" of society. The assumption

> underlying this approach is that if students acquire the appropriate skills, they will then be able to succeed in society through hard work and perseverance. This approach does not critique the society into which students will move, nor does it encourage the students to critique society. Rather, it builds on what students bring to school to enable them to acquire more successfully what schools have to offer students as a whole. Many advocates of this assimilationist approach do not question the priorities and values of "mainstream" society, nor does it acknowledge the barriers, built and supported by bigotry, which prevent people from living meaningful lives regardless of skill, motivation, or intellect. It also implies "deficit" status; that is, "those people" need to be helped to be like "us." (p. 2).

Even though Spady (1992) believes transformational OBE is beyond traditional OBE, its interpretation of success constitutes a vivid example of education which leaves the current school and societal structure and their accompanying inequities intact.

"Master". OBE demands that all students 'master' the curriculum. This language implies a one way, unidirectional process in which students "subdue" or "control" the curriculum. A student/curriculum interchange, and how they both evolve and change over time through their interaction with one another is

not considered. Further, if students fail to "get it", that is fail to control or to master the knowledge, then it is their own fault. They just need more time to learn the material which may or may not be relevant to them. When students fail to master the curriculum, neither the curriculum itself nor the process of teaching are questioned. Further, the "success" of some students "mastering" the curriculum serves to legitimate the process and content of OBE. Teachers and administrators can admonish students who fail to "learn" under this system when they can point out that "nearly all the other students in the class have mastered this, why haven't you?"

"Outcomes". Outcomes in OBE pivot on two central questions whose answers are synergistically entwined: Who determines the outcomes, and what is the content of those outcomes?

First, in the state-level implementation of OBE, it appears that student exit outcomes are determined at the state level, while local communities are instructed to set about devising the means to reach those outcomes. Those with the greatest influence on the development and implementation of OBE include state policy makers, educational consultants, local administrators, and teachers selected to develop outcomes and who deliver the curriculum. The students whom OBE seeks to assist--or those students' proxies--are not included in the construction of the outcomes, objectives, and curriculum. Thus it is the power

elite--not the disenfranchised students or their advocates, those whom OBE is purported to target--who make these decisions.

Second, the people who determine exit outcomes strongly influence the content of those outcomes. OBE implies a mandated set of outcomes applied to all students regardless of their needs, personal status, and interests. For example, in the OBE system a student who cannot demonstrate mastery of all the lesson outcomes, but can display other knowledge and skills in addition to, or beyond those of the lesson, would not be given credit for this knowledge and skill as it was not specifically prescribed by the goals, objectives, and outcomes. Therefore, what is validated as knowledge and what is counted as important to learn, far from being politically neutral, remains under the influence of the power of those who determine the outcomes. OBE policy dictates and controls the social/educational possibilities of students in terms of what they should be like upon graduation. This is done in the name of rationality and reason.

"Control". OBE claims that schools control the conditions of success. Again, the language of control dominates, and student and other underrepresented input is denied. The instructional practice component of OBE (mastery learning) can also be questioned in terms of control. Teachers, and not students, seem to be the dominated party here. In this case researchers and administrators arrive at the common sense decision to make all teachers teach (and, by extension, all

children learn) in precisely the same manner. In no part of OBE literature is there substantial thought given to alternative possibilities for effective teaching.

Other Aspects of Power

In addition to the power issues associated specifically with the language of OBE, other issues of power emerge related to the core and extended curriculum, computer management, and criterion-based assessment.

Core and extended curricula. OBE proposes a core and extended curriculum as necessary to properly educate students. The core curriculum is streamlined, and consists of only the most critical skills for students to "master". The extended curriculum exists to provide enriched opportunities for quicker learning students, while their slower peers complete the core curriculum. On the surface, such a practice might seem laudable--slower students are not forced to leave a critical skill unlearned before moving on to the next. A deconstructive approach unearths other possibilities. Implicit in the two curriculums is a hierarchy. Access to the extended curriculum is restricted by accomplishment of the core curriculum. It is quite possible that some students would never gain entrance to the enriched curriculum--simply creating a class of student denied the opportunity to participate in a significant part of education. Issues of worth, access, opportunity and control are prevalent in a system which will not allow a student entrance to

all facets of the educational experience. The core and extended curricula are euphemisms for parallel systems--constructed in a rational, logical fashion for the betterment of disenfranchised groups. This extended curriculum could just as easily be labeled "gifted," "advanced," or "elite". The names are simply movement up or down a continuum of exclusivity. A system which creates a set of knowledge which is not made available to a particular group of students in the name of rational discourse simply limits opportunity.

Computer management. OBE involves the use of an information management system to determine which students have learned particular skills and which have not. This follows the mastery learning philosophy of not allowing a student to advance until all prerequisite skills have been mastered. Once again the idea of "qualifying" for the next level of instruction (or opportunity) and being grouped with others at the same "level" conjures up issues of access, restriction, and control by the system. Though OBE advocates would point out the practice as humane; for many students the duty to demonstrate their right to move on to the next educational opportunity is another form of oppression.

The use of a computer management system to "control" this process is anticipated by the work of Foucault, as cited in Burrell (1988). Foucault likened modern forms of control to latter day prisons. In modern form, this imprisonment does not

take physical form, but rather in hidden forms of "carceral" control. The computer management system is just such a metaphor for Foucault. By dictating learner groupings (learner opportunity) it quietly patrols the OBE system, and seeks to incarcerate students and teachers by prescribing who is allowed to learn, and who can be taught.

Criterion-based assessment. The use of criterion based assessments are ostensibly a bit more benign, but can also be seen as a tool to reinforce OBE practice. In all likelihood, students who are evaluated by an instrument which is 100% aligned with a given system will yield results which reinforce that system. Even students who are significantly behind their age peers in an OBE environment can be rationalized by the fact that neither the child nor the system are at fault--the child simply needs more time. In the meantime the student will continue to be denied the full range of educational opportunity since s/he is unable to earn "entrance" to the opportunities of the extension curriculum, or learning groups that contain his or her peers.

Summary. Although OBE does attempt to function in a critical frame of reference, a deconstructive analysis reveals the overarching power structure that has infected the "rational discourse" used to arrive at the "best" possible system of helping all students--OBE. OBE advocates would claim to question the authority of the present educational paradigm of structural functionalism, but in being part of that paradigm are in essence

the authority themselves. There does seem to be evidence to claim that at best, OBE proponents attempt to operate in the critical tradition, yet fall prey to the overarching power structure of which they are part.

Implications

It is troubling to us that so many school districts and entire state departments of education and their policy makers, have uncritically embraced OBE as the educational panacea for all students in public education. It is even more troubling when OBE is labeled as "transformational" when in fact, it can reproduce and exacerbate educational and societal inequities.

One criticism of poststructural deconstruction is that it leaves nothing but rubble. There is no mythical Phoenix to rise from the ashes and renew itself. Poststructuralists (Lather, 1989) have offered counsel regarding this, and urged those feeling such discomfort to not rush to create a new structure in place of the old. Nonetheless, there do seem to be some specific implications rising out of the deconstructive debris.

What should policy makers, state education leaders and local education personnel consider before they rush into full acceptance and implementation of OBE and its derivatives? First, OBE derives from the structural functionalist paradigm, and even in its cloak of "transformation," it fails to challenge the status quo and existing power relations in schools and society.

Nearly all school reform initiatives in the history of education have emanated from this paradigm. The results of these initiatives have served only to reinforce the cliche' that the more things change, the more they remain the same. Therefore, educators should consider the wisdom of gulping an initiative which pours from the same fountain of so many failed reforms.

Second, given its grounding in structural functionalism, educators should consider the perspectives of other paradigms of thought and what they can offer to the educational enterprise. Often initiatives like OBE are promulgated without any discussion of their limitations or alternative perspectives which could at least enhance and broaden the initiatives.

Third, if, after discussion and critical reflection, educators would choose to adopt some aspects of OBE, such as the development of student exit outcomes, then educators should critically reflect on those outcomes from the array of epistemological possibilities. It is not that educators adopting OBE have carelessly considered student exit outcomes. On the contrary, the literature suggests that student exit outcomes are determined only after extensive discussion and thought. These outcomes, however, possibly may only be considered in the context of a structural functionalist perspective. Further, if other epistemological and theoretical perspectives are considered, we would envision a shift in language beyond images of domination, control, and submission. This language could include terms such

as ". . . personal purposes, holistic context, personal and social meanings, interaction, reciprocity, the student's perspective, the child's interests, intrinsic motivation, . . . the role of unpredictability, indeterminism, zones of uncertainty, . . . initiatives, ownership over problem formation, self-organization, . . . reflexivity, reflectivity, . . . culture and identity" (Heshusius, 1992, p. 322).

Fourth, and closely related, we question the "mass" process of developing student outcomes which would be invoked on all students. In contrast, we would envision a process similar to that used in innovative practices for students with disabilities such as the McGill Action Planning System (MAPS) where each individual student, who is a full participant in the process, along with his/her family, friends, and classmates, consider their dreams for the student and their nightmares, as well as the students strengths.

Fifth, these individually developed student outcomes, would be expected to constantly evolve over the time of the student's education. These student outcomes, considered in the context of epistemological and theoretical paradigms in addition to structural functionalism, then would invoke differing visions of student success and its societal context, and what it means to learn.

Sixth, educators considering OBE need to identity who "all" the students are in their districts and who are representative of

society. They must ensure that all students and the accompanying societal diversity, and their parents and related education personnel are fully included in the process and empowered to participate in the process from its inception (Capper, in press-b). Another practice might allow students to select the rate at which they choose to learn, the style in which they best learn, and the learning groups in which they choose to be included. These learning "access" issues are primary to creating equity and empowerment in education. An educational system which aims to emancipate their students will actively court students, parents, and community in developing the desired outcomes of education and its resultant curriculum. Further, all students must be afforded access to the information contained in the euphemistically titled "extended" curriculum.

Conclusion

It is at this point that poststructuralists would wish to halt the process, and continue an endless state of tension, dissensus, and process. In such a processual act, poststructuralists see the only hope to avoid the re-establishment of a new, dominant hierarchy of ideas. In the poststructural world there is no final moment of "knowing," with no beginning point, nor end. It shuns elevating any idea, system, or symbol to the status of solution. Poststructuralism instead seeks to foster the natural tension and disagreement that

is inherent in life. It teaches how to identify power, and the processes by which to avoid being ruled by it. A universal lament of those who would wish to orient their practice based on the above observations is that poststructuralism fails to move beyond its deconstructive leveling of the status quo. Critical theory, though fraught with difficulty, does provide some emancipatory hope and direction, despite the dire warnings forecast by poststructural thought. An uneasy partnership between critical theory and poststructuralism can exist, with the critical view setting the emancipatory direction, and the poststructural providing the tools to avoid creating a new power elite. OBE may have merit if it can reinvent itself within the guidance of these alternative perspectives.

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TABLE 1.1. Twelve Principles of Holistic Constructivist Learning Theory Contrasted with Their Reductionist Pedagogical Counterparts

PRINCIPLES OF BEHAVIORAL/REDUCTIONISTIC LEARNING PROCESS	PRINCIPLES OF THE HOLISTIC CONSTRUCTIVIST TEACHING/LEARNING PROCESS
1. Learning is additive; the sum of the parts is equal to the whole.	1. The whole of the learned experience is greater than the sum of its parts.
2. New learning is simply taken in and recorded as it exists in the curriculum, text, etc. Things are learned, not constructed.	2. The interaction of the learned experience transforms both the individual's spiral (whole) and the single experience (part).
3. Learning is regulated by the teacher.	3. The learner's spiral of knowledge is self-regulating and self-preserving.
4. People must be externally motivated to learn.	4. All people are learners actively searching for and constructing new meanings.
5. There is an ideal sequence in which to present new information.	5. The best predictor of what and how someone will learn is what they already know.
6. Form (accuracy and fact) is of primary importance; it precedes meaning and purpose.	6. The development of accurate forms follows the emergence of function and meaning.
7. Learning is best accomplished from part to whole.	7. Learning often proceeds from whole to part to whole.
8. Errors are to be avoided.	8. Errors are critical to learning.
9. Teaching is a science. Technique (method) determines the degree of student learning.	9. Learners learn best from experiences in which they are passionately involved.
10. All teachers can teach all students given the appropriate method.	10. Learners learn best from people they trust.
11. The curriculum determines the content and the timing of presentation.	11. Experiences connected to the learner's present knowledge and interest are learned best.
12. The human mind must be made to learn.	12. Integrity is a primary characteristic of the human (learner's) mind.

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